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⑤④ **A semiconductor optical element.**

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- ⑦③ Proprietor : **KOKUSAI DENSHIN DENWA CO.,**
LTD
3-2, Nishi-shinjuku 2-Chome
Shinjuku-ku Tokyo (JP)
- ⑦② Inventor : **Haus, Hermann A.**
36-351, Res. Lab. of Electronics
Mass. Inst. of Tech., Cambridge MA 02139 (US)
Inventor : Utaka, Katsuyuki
14-8, Akatsuka
4-chome, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo (JP)
- ⑦④ Representative : **Mongrédién, André et al**
c/o SOCIETE DE PROTECTION DES
INVENTIONS
25, rue de Ponthieu
F-75008 Paris (FR)

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Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to semiconductor optical elements and its application to laser diodes which operate with net optical gain or net refractive index kept almost constant even if the other parameter is varied.

Change of injected carrier density, optical gain, and refractive index are related to each other in a semiconductor medium. This results in chirping under a high speed modulation or unwanted amplitude modulation even if pure frequency modulation is desired by changing the injection currents in conventional semiconductor laser diodes. These phenomena degrade transmission performance in optical fiber communication systems, which limit the repeater span due to dispersion or noise. In order to avoid these problems and realize ideal AM (amplitude modulation) or FM (frequency modulation) lasers, external modulators are usually employed. These schemes, however, have drawbacks such as rather complicated device structure, larger size, as well as the limits on the achievable modulation index of FM lasers.

As for a wavelength tunable filter in which a corrugation grating is formed along an active layer and the Bragg wavelength is varied by changing the refractive index associated with carrier injection in the active layer, this carrier change is also accompanied by a gain change leading to changes of transmission and reflection efficiencies at the Bragg wavelength. This structure requires a gain adjusting region to keep the insertion loss constant.

Applied Physics Letters, vol. 55, no. 18, 30.10.89, pages 1826 - 1828 describes a theory and presents measurements of the FM response in DFB lasers having two active segments. The FM response is different in lasers operating in red- and blue-shifted static tuning regimes.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention as described in the following is motivated by a desire to overcome such problems and to provide semiconductor laser diodes which operate with almost constant optical gain or refractive index under modulation.

The invention as specified in claim 1 comprises first and second semiconductor regions in which the signs of the ratio of refractive index change to gain change associated with injected carrier density change (hereinafter the "α parameter") are opposite to each other. The adjustment of injection currents into said regions can yield a constant refractive index even under change of the optical gain and vice versa. Henceforth, this semiconductor optical element is referred to as "opposite sign α parameter (OSAP) element".

ment".

The OSAP element can operate in three kinds of modes; the antisymmetric sign refractive index change mode (+- or -+ mode), the positive symmetric sign refractive index change mode (++) mode) and the negative symmetric sign refractive index change mode (-- mode).

Fig.1 depicts, for the case of the +- mode, the spectra of gain, gain change, refractive index change and α parameter of semiconductor regions I and II, whose respective bandgap energies are optimally chosen to be E_{g1} and E_{g2} ($>E_{g1}$). Here the case is taken of increasing injection carrier densities in both regions. If the increases are ΔN_1 and ΔN_2 (>0), the optical gains g may change from the broken lines to the solid lines, as shown in Fig.1(a). The gain change spectrum is as shown in Fig.1(b). The refractive index change is related to the gain change by the Kramers-Kronig relation, and its spectrum is shown in Fig.1(c). Fig.1(d) shows the ratio of refractive index change Δn to gain change Δg due to carrier density change ΔN , i.e. the α parameter $\alpha = (\Delta n / \Delta N) / (\Delta g / \Delta N)$. These spectra show that an optimal choice of the photon energy E_0 can make the refractive index changes of the two regions I and II equal in magnitude and opposite in sign, $\Delta n_1 = -\Delta n_2$. To attain this state requires that the photon energy E_0 be within the range denoted by A, in which the signs of the α parameters of the two regions are opposite to each other. Even if the absolute values of the α parameters are not equal, appropriate adjustment of the injected carrier densities can realize the above state, $\Delta n_1 = -\Delta n_2$. For the +- mode shown in Fig.1, carrier density increases in both regions, $\Delta N_1 > 0$ and $\Delta N_2 > 0$, cause the state $\Delta n_1 = -\Delta n_2 > 0$. Similarly, carrier density decreases in both regions render opposite signs of refractive index changes such that $\Delta n_2 = -\Delta n_1 > 0$, which is referred as the -+ mode.

Fig.2 shows the spectra for the ++ mode with an increase in the carrier density in region I and a decrease in the carrier density in region II, $\Delta N_1 > 0$, $\Delta N_2 < 0$. This case leads to an increase in the refractive indices for the both regions. Appropriate selection of photon energy and adjustment of carrier density change can make $\Delta n_1 = \Delta n_2 > 0$.

The spectra for the case of the -- mode in which a decrease in the carrier density in region I and an increase in the carrier density in region II, $\Delta N_1 < 0$, $\Delta N_2 > 0$, are depicted in Fig.3. Contrary to the case of Fig.2, the refractive indices of both regions decrease, and also suitable selection of the photon energy and adjustment of carrier density can realize $\Delta n_1 = \Delta n_2 < 0$.

If the OSAP element is applied to laser diodes, the +- and -+ modes can realize an AM laser, and the ++ and -- an FM laser. It is also applicable to other optical devices such as a wavelength tunable filter or reflector together with a corrugation and an optical waveguide and a phase modulator.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other objects, features, and attendant advantages of the present invention will be appreciated as the same become better understood by means of the following description and accompanying drawings wherein;

Figs.1 through 3 are spectra of gain, refractive index, α parameter and so on of first and second semiconductor regions for various operating modes according to the invention;

Fig.4 is a cross-sectional view of the first embodiment according to the invention;

Fig.5 presents a time plot explaining the operation of the first embodiment according to the invention;

Fig.6 is a cross-sectional view of the second embodiment according to the invention;

Fig.7 is a cross-sectional view of the third embodiment according to the invention;

Fig.8 presents time plots explaining the operation of the second embodiment according to the invention;

Fig.9 is a cross-sectional view of the forth embodiment according to the invention; and

Fig.10 is a cross-sectional view of the fifth embodiment according to the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

(EMBODIMENT 1)

The first application of this OSAP element is a semi-conductor laser diode in which the two regions of the OSAP element are arranged serially in the direction of light propagation. Fig.4 schematically illustrates a cross section of the structure. Here devices operating in a $1.5\mu\text{m}$ wavelength range are taken as examples in the following explanation.

Reference numeral 1 indicates an n-InP substrate, 2 an n-InGaAsP waveguide layer, 3 and 3' indicate InGaAsP active layers with α parameters of opposite signs, 4 a p-InP cladding layer, 5 a p-InGaAsP cap layer, 6 a semi-insulating InP burying layer. A $\lambda/4$ -shifted corrugation 7 selects the wavelength which makes the signs of the α parameters of the said two active regions 3 and 3' opposite respectively, and consequently this laser operates as a window-type $\lambda/4$ -shifted distributed feedback laser diode. It is noted that a $\lambda/4$ -shift 8 is formed at the interface of the said two active regions. Reference numerals 9 and 9' indicate p-side electrodes for independent carrier injections to the said active layers 3 and 3', and Zn-diffused regions 10 and 10' are formed for the reduction of ohmic resistance. Reference numeral 11 indicates an n-side electrode, and 12 and 12' are anti-reflection coating films.

The operation of this embodiment is explained in the following. The signs of α parameters of the active layers 3 (region I) and 3' (region II) are assumed to be positive and negative, respectively. Carrier densities are changed by $\Delta N_1 (>0)$ and $\Delta N_2 (<0)$ by changing the injection current densities to the regions I and II from J_1 and J_2 to J_1' and J_2' , respectively, as shown in the time plots of Fig.5. This case corresponds to the ++ mode, and the refractive indices of each region increase from n_0 to n_0' . It should be noted that the original refractive indices of regions I and II can be set almost equal by designing waveguide parameters such as thicknesses of the active layers 3 and 3' or barriers especially for the application of quantum well structure as described later. Consequently, the lasing wavelength, which is determined by the corrugation period and refractive index, can be changed from λ_0 to λ_0' . At the same time, since the net optical gain can be fixed even under these refractive index changes, the output power is also kept almost constant at P_0 . On the other hand, return of injection current densities in both regions, from J_1' and J_2' to the original levels J_1 and J_2 , also reduces the refractive indices to the original values n_0 from n_0' due to the -- mode so that the same thing happens for the lasing wavelength from λ_0' to λ_0 , during which operation the output power remains almost constant at P_0 . This means a laser diode is realized whose lasing wavelength can be modulated by change of injection currents with constant output power, a so-called FM laser. From another point of view, it can work as a tunable laser. In this case, the changes of the injection current densities are adjusted so as to attain almost the same refractive index changes in both regions while keeping the net gain constant.

(EMBODIMENT 2)

Fig.4 is an embodiment which is composed of two regions, and the same effect as described in embodiment 1 can be realized even if a three region structure is adopted as shown in Fig.6. This structure is symmetric, and a $\lambda/4$ -shift is formed in region I, which may lead to better uniformity around a $\lambda/4$ -shift and easier gain adjustment. It is needless to say that a change of the relative positions of regions I and II produces the same effect.

This embodiment suggests the number of regions can be increased owing to the same principle.

(EMBODIMENT 3)

The example of an embodiment in which this invention is applied to a distributed Bragg reflector is shown in Fig.7. It contains InGaAsP passive waveguides 13 and 13' in the extension along the light propagation of active regions I and II in which the signs of the α parameters are opposite, and gratings

14 and 14' for distributed reflectors on said respective waveguides so as to select the wavelength. Fig.8 illustrates time plots to explain the operation of this embodiment. When the injection current densities increase from J_1 and J_2 to J_1' and J_2' , the carrier densities also increase in both regions. The refractive indices, however, change in different directions due to the opposite signs of the α parameters, such as an increase in region I and a decrease in region II, which corresponds to the +- mode. If the refractive index changes are Δn_1 and Δn_2 , the phase change in the active regions given by $\Delta n_1 L_1 + \Delta n_2 L_2$, where L_1 and L_2 are the lengths of said active regions I and II, respectively. Since the signs of Δn_1 and Δn_2 are opposite, said phase change can remain null by adjusting the absolute values of Δn_1 and Δn_2 . Consequently, the lasing wavelength λ_0 , which is determined by the phase condition in a laser cavity, also remains unchanged. On the other hand, the output power increases from P_0 to P_0' owing to increase of carrier densities to both regions. Contrary, decrease of injection current densities in both regions only inverts the signs of change of each parameter and keeps the amount of phase change zero, so that the lasing wavelength remains unchanged. This embodiment operates as an ultra low chirp AM laser in which the lasing wavelength is held constant and only the optical intensity is modulated.

It should be noted that this embodiment also operates in the manner of the ++ or -- modes as shown in the time plots of Fig.5. It works as an FM laser.

(EMBODIMENT 4)

The embodiments described above include the OSAP elements in which two kinds of regions with α parameters of opposite signs are arranged in series in the direction of light propagation. The same effect is expected even if said two regions are arranged in parallel. This embodiment is shown in Fig.9. This is a window-type $\lambda/4$ -shifted distributed feedback structure, and Fig.9(a) illustrates the schematic cross section in the direction of light propagation and (b) one perpendicular to it.

As shown in Fig.9(b), two kinds of active regions 3 (region I) and 3' (region II) with α parameters of opposite signs are arranged in parallel to form a stripe. Consequently, a transverse mode propagates with a profile containing said stripe. Reference numeral 15 indicates a semi-insulating InP cladding layer, 16 and 16' p-InP layers, and carriers can be injected independently to each region I and II through each electrode 9 and 9' as shown by the arrows in the figure. This embodiment can operate in all the modes described in Fig.5 and Fig.8, employing the same principles, and realizes AM, FM and wavelength tunable lasers. This embodiment effectively avoids propagation delay and nonuniformity along the light propagation, since

said two regions are formed in parallel and said transverse mode experiences gain changes and/or refractive index changes of said two regions in the same cross section.

(EMBODIMENT 5)

The embodiment in which the OSAP element according to this invention is applied to a wavelength tunable reflection type filter for a wavelength tunable laser is schematically shown in Fig.10. This embodiment consists of three regions, namely an active region, a phase adjusting region and a narrow bandwidth Bragg reflector. In this reflector, a directional coupler in which two waveguides with almost the same propagation constants are closely arranged in parallel is utilized. A $\lambda/4$ -shifted corrugation grating is formed on one of said waveguides, and light is fed in and taken out through the other waveguide. A center wavelength of reflection can be tuned by changing the refractive indices of said waveguide on which a $\lambda/4$ -shifted grating is formed.

A narrow bandwidth Bragg reflector region contains an n-InP substrate 101, an n-InGaAsP low-loss waveguide layer 102, an n-InP layer 103, InGaAsP active regions I and II with α parameters of opposite signs 104 and 104', and a p-InGaAsP layer 105, on which a $\lambda/4$ -shifted grating 106 is formed for a filter where reference numeral 107 indicates a $\lambda/4$ -shift. Also a p-InP cladding layer 108, InGaAsP cap layer 109, a p-side electrodes 110 and 110' for carrier injection to each region, Zn-diffused regions 111 and 111' and an n-side electrode 112 are included. In said active region, an InGaAsP active layer 113 is comprised, and said active layer 113 does not necessarily have the same composition as layers 104 and 104'. As for said phase adjusting region, it consists of said n-InGaAsP waveguide layer 102 and a p-InP cladding layer 108.

Said narrow bandwidth Bragg reflector of this embodiment fundamentally performs the same functions as those of the embodiment shown in Fig.6 as far as the structure including above said active layers 104 and 104' is concerned. The ++ or -- modes operation makes the net optical gain constant and varies the refractive index uniformly. The difference from Fig.6 is that this embodiment contains another waveguide 102 coupled with said active layers 104 and 104' by the manner of a directional coupler, and light propagating from said phase adjusting region couples into said active layers 104 and 104' in said narrow bandwidth Bragg reflector region. As is well known, a $\lambda/4$ -shifted grating can fairly confine the light of Bragg wavelength, and thus confined light couples back again into the original waveguide 102 and propagates out to left direction. This indicates that said reflector works as a narrow bandwidth reflector which is effective only for the Bragg wave-

length. Since the Bragg wavelength is determined by the corrugation period and refractive index of a waveguide, said ++ or -- mode operations can change the reflection wavelength while keeping the reflectivity constant. Light at said Bragg wavelength is amplified in the active region and its phase is adjusted in the phase adjusting region to oscillate. Note that a phase adjustment by the electrooptic effect, in which a reverse voltage V_1 is applied, seems effective in avoiding an excessive loss increase, but the method of carrier injection may attain the same effect. Since, as mentioned above, a tunable laser according to this invention not only has excellent wavelength selectivity but also does not increase its threshold excessively even under the wavelength tuning action, spectral properties may not deteriorate in the tuning operation even if applied to a narrow linewidth laser. Accordingly, a narrow linewidth-tunable laser is realized.

The OSAP elements are obtained by adjusting the compositions whose bandgap energies are suitable and by selecting an optimal wavelength by corrugation gratings. Not limited by conventional bulk semiconductors, these regions may be constructed by quantum wells, wires or boxes, which offer the advantage of easy assignment of optimal wavelength and less deviation of wavelength under change of injection current, so that operation in wider wavelength ranges can be expected.

In the above description, an InGaAsP crystal system for 1.5 μ m wavelength operation was used as an example, and AlGaAs, AlInGaAs, AlGaInP, AlGaAsSb and other crystal systems are also appropriate.

As described above, according to this invention which contains two kinds of semiconductor regions with α parameters of opposite signs, either optical gains or refractive indices can be changed with the other kept constant by adjusting injection currents to each region. This feature realizes an ultra-low chirp laser, an ideal FM laser, a high performance wavelength tunable laser and so on. Consequently, this invention is appropriate for light sources for long-haul large capacity transmission schemes by direct modulation intensity detection or coherent schemes and for lightwave multiplexing systems.

Claims

1. A semiconductor optical element comprising an active layer (3,3'),
said active layer comprising a first region (I) and a second region (II) coupled optically with each other, and having opposite signs of α parameters with respect to each other in a selected range (A) of photon energy (E), where α is the ratio of change of refractive index to change of gain following change of carrier density.
2. The element according to claim 1, in which said first and second regions comprise quantum wells, quantum wires, or quantum boxes or any combination of said quantum structures.
3. The element according to claims 1 or 2, in which said first and second regions are arranged in series in the direction of light propagation.
4. The element according to claims 1 or 2, in which said first and second regions are arranged in parallel in the direction of light propagation.
5. The element according to claims 1 or 2, in which said first and second regions have means for independent carrier injection.
6. The element according to claims 1 or 2, including a corrugation grating along said first and second regions to select the wavelength at which respective signs of α parameters of said first and second regions are opposite to each other.
7. The element according to claim 6, in which said corrugation grating comprises $\lambda/4$ -shifted corrugation.
8. The element according to claims 1 or 2, comprising corrugation gratings outside said first and second regions to select the wavelength at which respective signs of α parameters of said first and second regions are opposite to each other.
9. The element according to claims 1 or 2, further comprising a third waveguide which couples along the whole length of said first and second regions and whose propagation constant is almost the same as those of said first and second regions.
10. The element according to claim 9, further comprising reflection means, such as a cleaved facet or a corrugation grating, at the extension position of said third waveguide, and a second active layer therein.
11. A semiconductor optical element comprising;
a semiconductor substrate (1),
a waveguide (2), an active layer (3,3') and a clad layer (4) formed on said semiconductor substrate,
said active layer comprising a first region (I) and a second region II coupled optically with each other, and having opposite signs of α parameters with respect to each other in a selected range (A) of photon energy (E), where α is the ratio of change of refractive index to change of gain following change of carrier density,

a first electrode (11) common to all regions attached on one side of said substrate, and second electrodes (9,9') for each region, attached on the other side of said substrate.

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Patentansprüche

1. Optisches Halbleiterbauelement mit einer aktiven Schicht (3, 3'), die einen ersten Bereich (I) und einen zweiten Bereich (II) aufweist, die miteinander gekoppelt sind und entgegengesetzte Vorzeichen von α -Parametern in einem ausgewählten Bereich (A) der Photonenenergie (E) aufweisen, wobei α das Verhältnis einer Brechungsindexänderung zu einer Verstärkungsänderung infolge einer Trägerdichteänderung ist. 10
2. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1, bei dem der erste und der zweite Bereich Quantentröge, Quantendrähte oder Quantenkästen oder irgendeine dieser Quantenstrukturen aufweisen. 20
3. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, bei dem der erste und der zweite Bereich in Richtung der Lichtausbreitung hintereinander angeordnet sind. 25
4. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, bei dem der erste und der zweite Bereich in Richtung der Lichtausbreitung parallel angeordnet sind. 30
5. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, bei dem der erste und der zweite Bereich Mittel zur unabhängigen Trägerinjektion aufweisen. 35
6. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, mit einem Wellungsgitter längs des ersten und zweiten Bereiches zur Auswahl der Wellenlänge, bei der die Vorzeichen der α -Parameter des ersten und zweiten Bereiches entgegengesetzt sind. 40
7. Bauelement nach Anspruch 6, bei dem das Wellungsgitter eine um $\lambda/4$ verschobene Wellung aufweist. 45
8. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, mit Wellungsgittern außerhalb des ersten und zweiten Bereiches zur Auswahl der Wellenlänge, bei der die Vorzeichen der α -Parameter des ersten und zweiten Bereiches entgegengesetzt sind. 50
9. Bauelement nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, mit einem dritten Wellenleiter, der auf der gesamten Länge des ersten und zweiten Bereiches angekoppelt ist und dessen Ausbreitungskonstante weitgehend gleich derjenigen des ersten und zweiten Bereiches ist. 55

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10. Bauelement nach Anspruch 9, mit Reflexionsmitteln, wie einer gespaltenen Facette oder einem Wellungsgitter, an der Verlängerungsstelle des dritten Wellenleiters, und einer zweiten aktiven Schicht darin.

11. Optisches Halbleiterbauelement mit: einem Halbleiter-Substrat (1), einem Wellenleiter (2), einer aktiven Schicht (3, 3') und einer Überzugsschicht (4), die auf dem Halbleiter-Substrat ausgebildet ist, wobei die aktive Schicht einen ersten Bereich (I) und einen zweiten Bereich (II) aufweist, die optisch miteinander gekoppelt sind und α -Parameter mit entgegengesetzten Vorzeichen in einem ausgewählten Bereich (A) der Photonenenergie (E) aufweisen, wobei α das Verhältnis einer Brechungsindexänderung zu einer Verstärkungsänderung infolge einer Trägerdichteänderung ist, einer ersten Elektrode (11), die allen Bereichen gemeinsam und auf der einen Seite des Substrats angebracht ist, und einer zweiten Elektroden (9, 9') für jeden Bereich, die auf der anderen Seite des Substrats angebracht sind.

Revendications

1. Élément optique à semiconducteurs comprenant une couche active (3, 3'), la dite couche active comprenant une première région (I) et une seconde région (II) couplées optiquement entre elles, et ayant des paramètres α de signes opposés l'un de l'autre dans une plage sélectionnée (A) de l'énergie des photons (E), où α est le rapport de la variation de l'indice de réfraction à la variation du gain résultant de la variation de la densité des porteurs.
2. Élément selon la revendication 1, dans lequel lesdites première et seconde régions comprennent des puits quantiques, des fils quantiques ou des boîtes quantiques ou toute combinaison desdites structures quantiques.
3. Élément selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, dans lequel lesdites première et seconde régions sont disposées en série dans la direction de propagation de la lumière.
4. Élément selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, dans lequel lesdites première et seconde régions sont disposées en parallèle dans la direction de propagation de la lumière.
5. Élément selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, dans lequel lesdites première et se-

conde régions comportent des moyens pour une injection de porteurs indépendante.

6. Élément selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, incluant un réseau d'ondulations le long desdites première et seconde régions pour sélectionner la longueur d'onde à laquelle les signes respectifs des paramètres α des dites première et seconde régions sont opposés l'un de l'autre. 5
10
7. Élément selon la revendication 6, dans lequel ledit réseau d'ondulations comprend un réseau d'ondulations à décalage de $\lambda/4$. 15
8. Élément selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, comprenant des réseaux d'ondulations hors desdites première et seconde régions pour sélectionner la longueur d'onde à laquelle les signes respectifs des paramètres α desdites première et seconde régions sont opposés l'un de l'autre. 20
9. Élément selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, comprenant en outre un troisième guide d'ondes qui est couplé sur toute la longueur desdites première et seconde régions et dont la constante de propagation est presque identique à celles desdites première et seconde régions. 25
30
10. Élément selon la revendication 9, comprenant en outre un moyen de réflexion, tel qu'une facette clivée ou un réseau d'ondulations, à la position de prolongement dudit troisième guide d'ondes, et une seconde couche active qui y est incluse. 35
11. Élément optique à semiconducteurs comprenant :
un substrat semiconducteur (1),
un guide d'ondes (2), une couche active 40
(3, 3') et une couche de revêtement (4) formée sur ledit substrat semiconducteur,
ladite couche active comprenant une première région (I) et une seconde région (II) couplées optiquement entre elles, et ayant des paramètres α de signes opposés l'un par rapport l'autre dans une plage sélectionnée (A) de l'énergie des photons (E), où α est le rapport de la variation de l'indice de réfraction à la variation du gain résultant de la variation de la densité des porteurs, 45
une première électrode (11) commune à toutes les régions, liée d'un côté dudit substrat, et,
des secondes électrodes (9, 9') pour chaque région, liées de l'autre côté dudit substrat. 50
55

Fig. 1

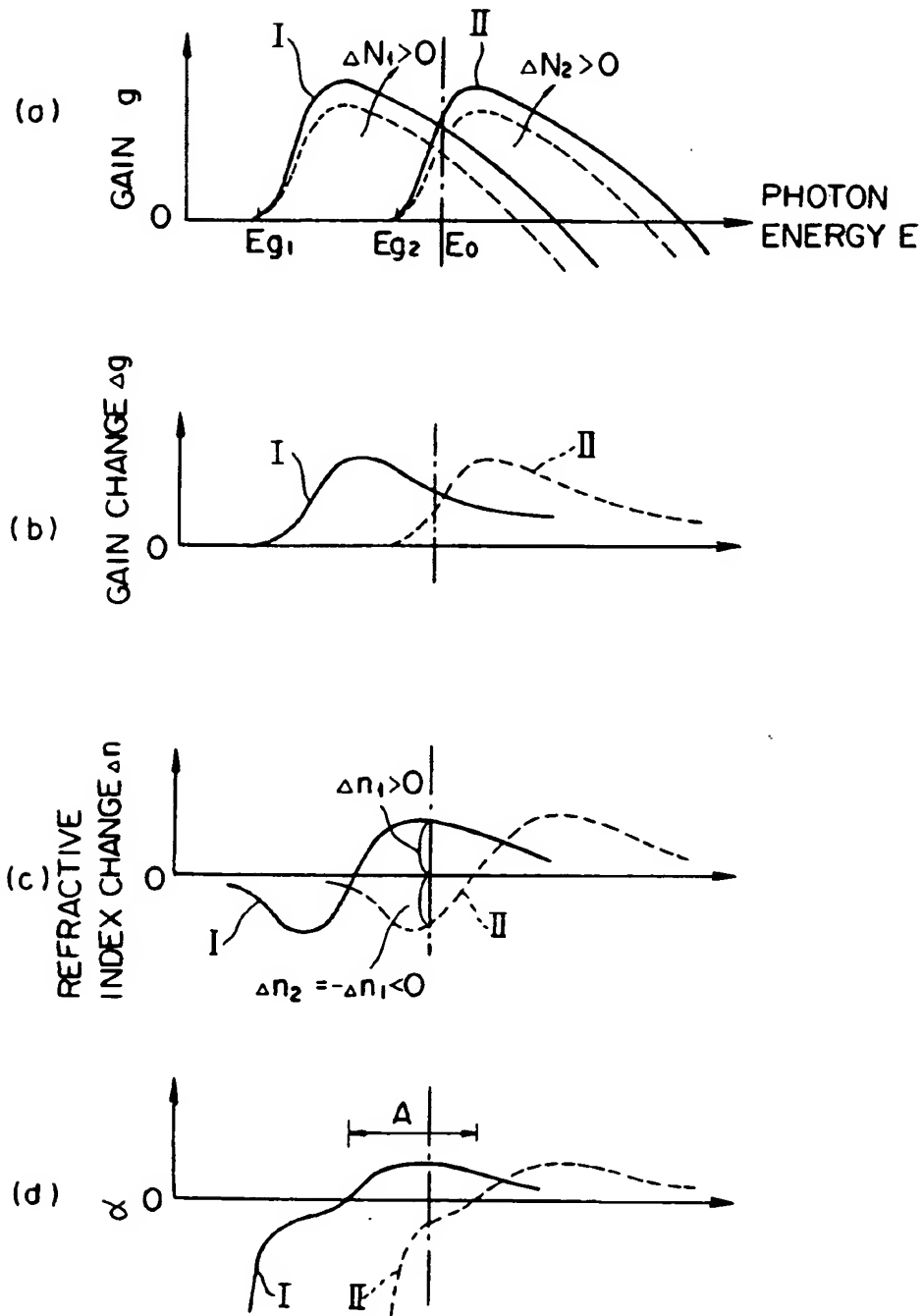


Fig. 2

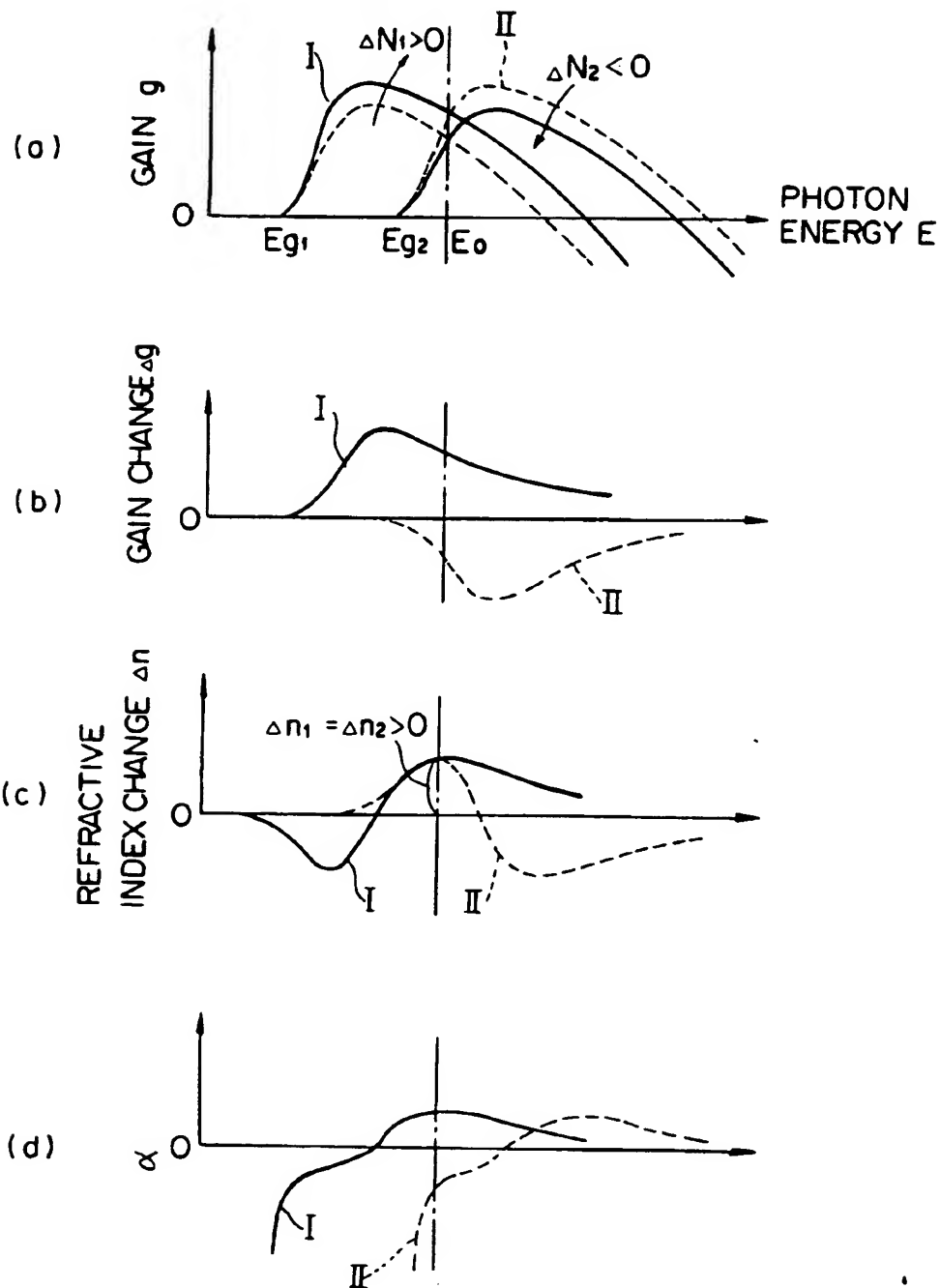


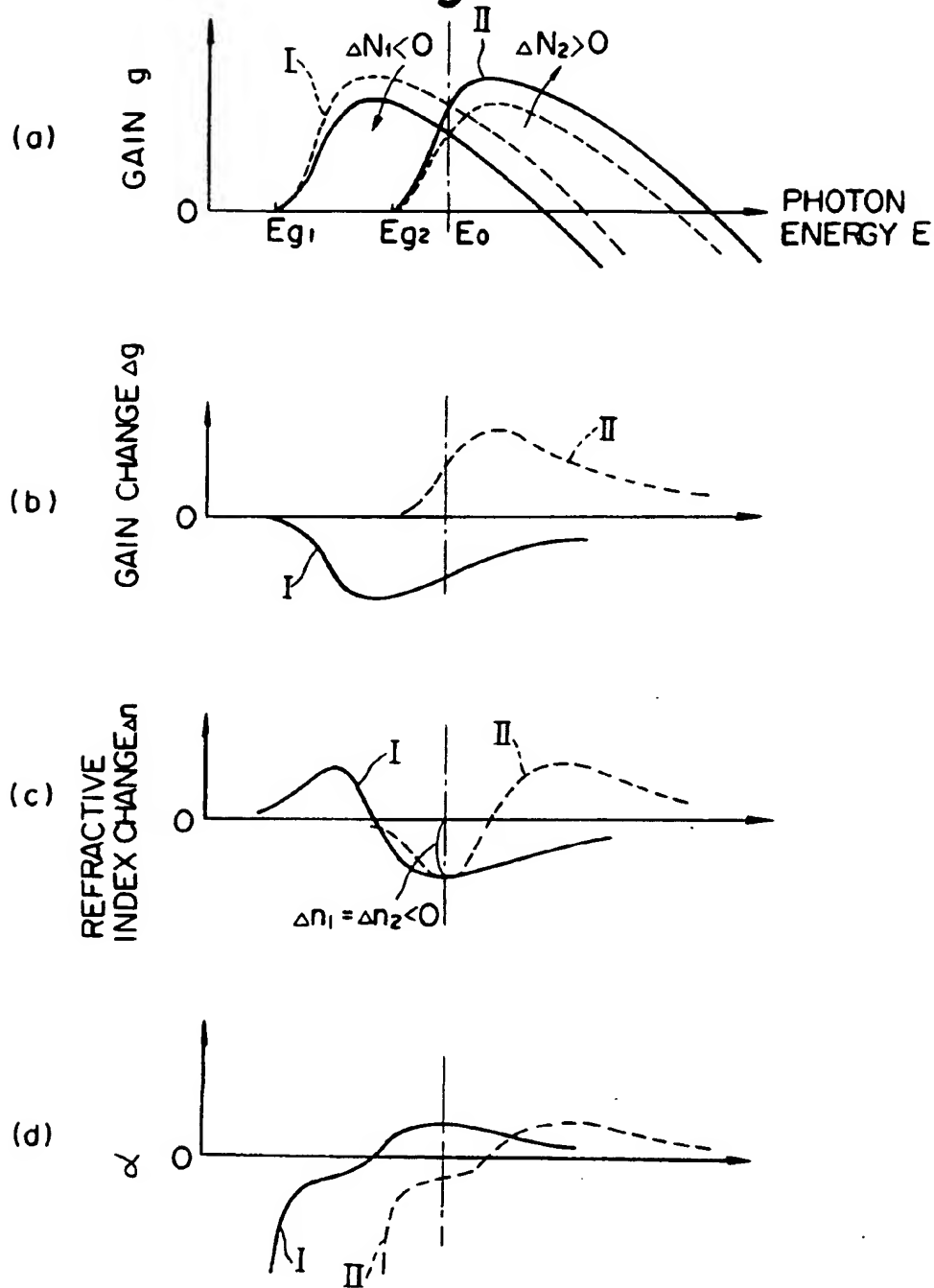
Fig. 3

Fig. 4

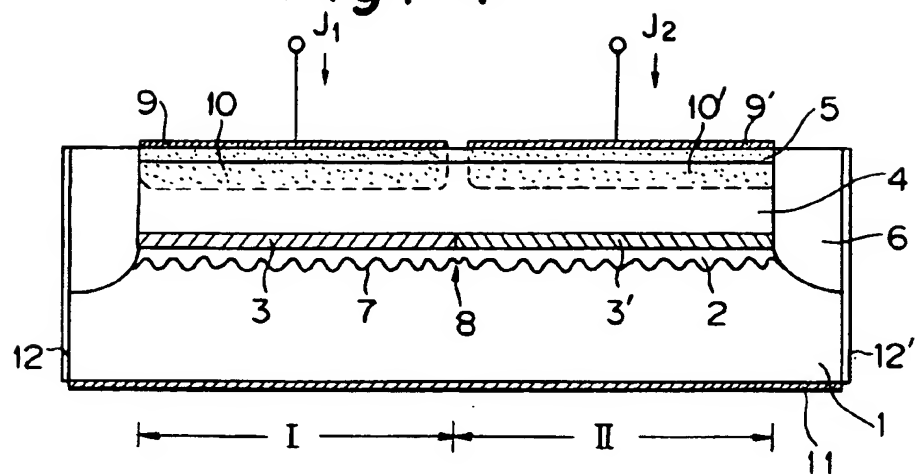


Fig. 5

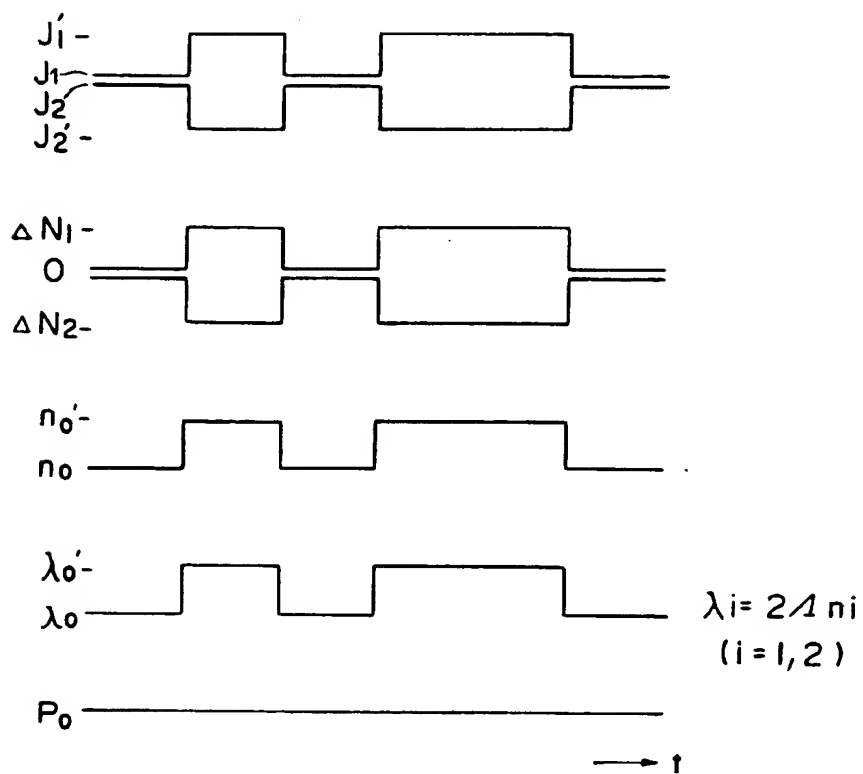


Fig. 6

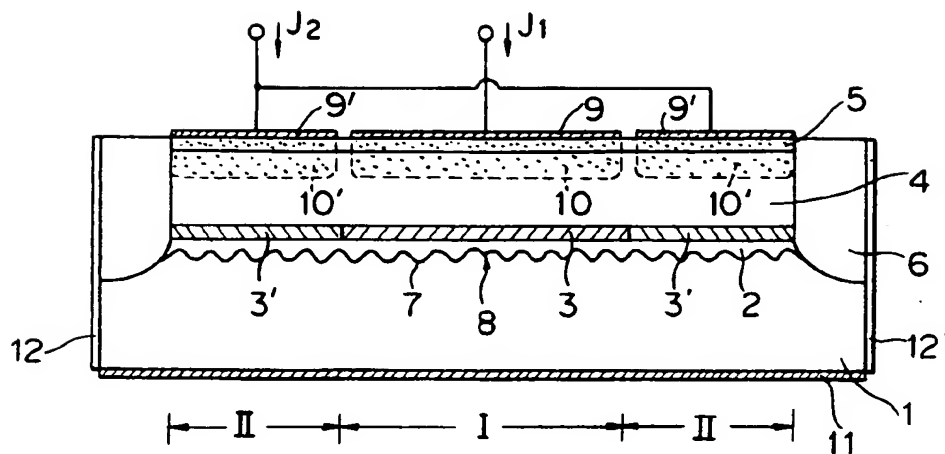


Fig. 7

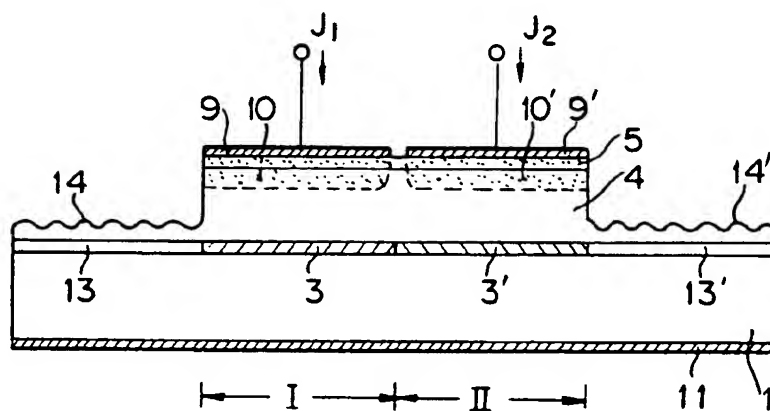


Fig. 8

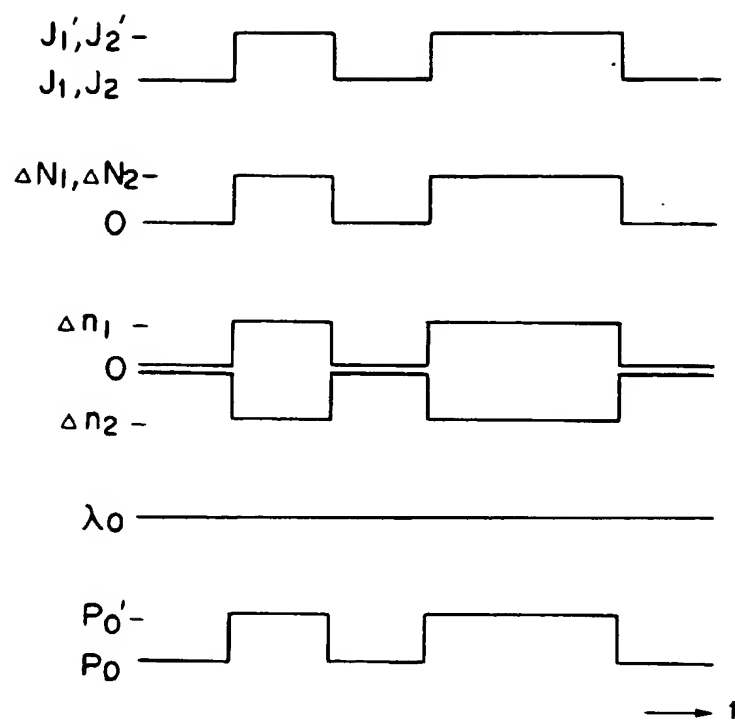


Fig. 9

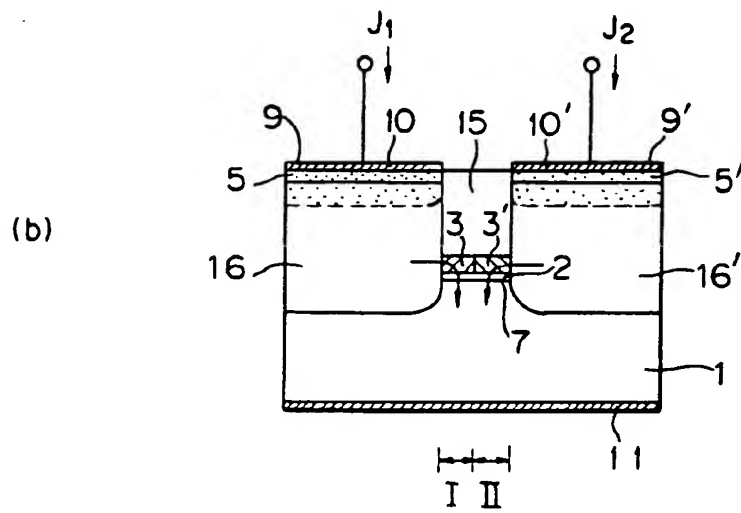
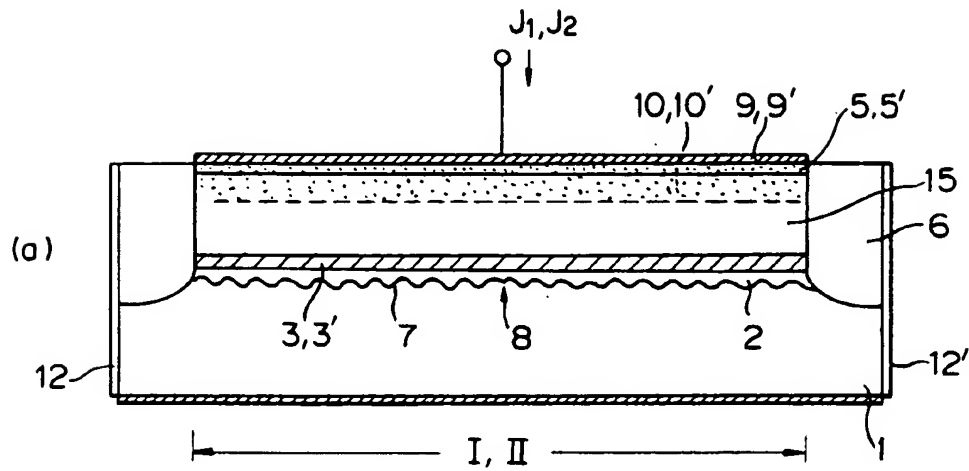


Fig. 10

